



Unit .06

Session .03

A Picture of Atonement

Scripture



Leviticus 16:2-6,15-22

2 The LORD said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron that he may not come whenever he wants into the holy place behind the curtain in front of the mercy seat on the ark or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud above the mercy seat. **3** “Aaron is to enter the most holy place in this way: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. **4** He is to wear a holy linen tunic, and linen undergarments are to be on his body. He is to tie a linen sash around him and wrap his head with a linen turban. These are holy garments; he must bathe his body with water before he wears them. **5** He is to take from the Israelite community two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. **6** “Aaron will present the bull for his sin offering and make atonement for himself and his household. ... **15** “When he slaughters the male goat for the people’s sin offering and brings its blood inside the curtain, he will do the same with its blood as he did with the bull’s blood: He is to sprinkle it against the mercy seat and in front of it. **16** He will make atonement for the most holy place in this way for all their sins because of the Israelites’ impurities and rebellious acts. He will do the

same for the tent of meeting that remains among them, because it is surrounded by their impurities. **17** No one may be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the most holy place until he leaves after he has made atonement for himself, his household, and the whole assembly of Israel. **18** Then he will go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it. He is to take some of the bull’s blood and some of the goat’s blood and put it on the horns on all sides of the altar. **19** He is to sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse and set it apart from the Israelites’ impurities. **20** “When he has finished making atonement for the most holy place, the tent of meeting, and the altar, he is to present the live male goat. **21** Aaron will lay both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the Israelites’ iniquities and rebellious acts—all their sins. He is to put them on the goat’s head and send it away into the wilderness by the man appointed for the task. **22** The goat will carry all their iniquities into a desolate land, and the man will release it there.”

Intro Options

Main Point:
**God provides
atonement for the
people's sins.**

Option 1

Before the session, gather the following items: clear pitcher filled with water, red food coloring, small cup of bleach, eyedropper, and spoon. As students arrive, invite them to share some sins they've committed in the past. Be sure to share a few sins you've committed as well. As you share, add a few drops of food coloring to the water. Tell students that in the same way food coloring contaminates water, sin contaminates our relationship with God and with others.

- **When have you wished you could “undo” a sin? Is that even possible? Explain.**

Slowly stir in the bleach until the water becomes clear again. Point out that while there's nothing we can do to remove the stain of sin in our lives, the blood of Christ makes it possible for us to be forgiven and made pure.

Note: Be sure to test the red water/bleach activity before using it in your session.

Option 2

Ask students to think of situations when someone else has taken a punishment for them, even though they were the ones who deserved it. If they don't have personal examples, ask them to share an example from a movie or book.

Give the example of Katniss Everdeen trading places with her sister, Prim, in *The Hunger Games*. She became an icon of heroism to those around her because of her selfless action. The typical human response is fight or flight, to stay alive, to do what's best for us. We're often shocked when people do the opposite, taking on a punishment that isn't rightfully theirs so that someone else doesn't have to experience it.

- **Why do we consider these actions heroic?**

The Israelites didn't necessarily have a volunteer to take the punishment for their sins, but God still provided a way through the blood of a goat, offered each year on the Day of Atonement. The goat's blood sacrifice covered the peoples' sins until the Day of Atonement the next year. Ultimately, God sent Jesus to be our substitute—One who willingly laid down His life for us.

TEACHING PLAN

All humanity is ruined by sin and separated from a holy God. One of God's reasons for giving us the Law was revealing this truth to us. The Law is a standard of perfection we cannot live up to. We don't just fall short; we fall miserably short. Even so, God's desire was to be near His people, to live in relationship with them, and He demonstrated this through the tabernacle. So how do these two truths coexist? How can holy God live with His sinful people?

The answer—or at least the picture of the answer—was given in the Day of Atonement. On this day, God purified His people and forgave their sins. And it all began with the high priest.

Read Leviticus 16:2-6.



▪ What stands out to you in the text about the Day of Atonement?

The Day of Atonement was an elaborate ceremony involving the entire assembly of God's people and various sacrifices, but at its center stood Aaron, the high priest. Aaron was the one man God appointed to come into His presence in the most holy place on this one day of the year; Aaron wasn't meant to take this responsibility lightly. For the other 364 days of the year, neither Aaron nor anyone else could not step foot in the most holy place; if they did, they would die. In this we see God's holiness. Aaron and the Israelites were not to approach God casually. Their sin had formed a barrier between them and God, illustrated by the veil dividing the holy place and the most holy place.

While Aaron was allowed to enter into the most holy place in the Day of Atonement, the people would gather outside the tabernacle and wait to see the drama of redemption unfold. They could not go, or even see, inside. Most of the day's events were hidden from their view inside the tabernacle. But they stood near, knowing one of their own—their representative before God—had gone inside God's sanctuary not just for himself, but for them as well.

▪ What do you think it was like for Aaron and consecutive high priests to approach God on the Day of Atonement? How can we approach a holy God?

While the details of this day may seem far removed from us, we must remember the problem God was addressing: how He, a perfect and holy God, could come and live with sinful people; how He, a just and righteous God, could hold His people accountable for their sins and yet forgive them at the same time. While we may not be able to relate with the events of the Day of Atonement, we can surely relate with these problems because they are the same ones we face today. God is just as holy, humanity is just as sinful, and access is just as limited.

▪ What ways do people sometimes try to approach God on their own terms or in their own way?

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
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Leviticus 16

16:2-6. God's warning to Aaron about approaching Him at the right time in the right way was not abstract. Aaron, and the rest of the people of Israel, saw what happened to those who approached God while disobeying His instructions. Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu, had presented unauthorized fire before the Lord and had been consumed by the Lord's fire (Lev. 10:1-2; 16:1). After they witnessed this, the people of Israel must have wondered if there was any way to draw near to God. Yes, there was a way; but it came on God's terms, not the people's.

The high priest usually wore elaborate garments, decorated and full of symbolism. His important role in the nation was clearly demonstrated by his clothing. But on the Day of Atonement, he would wear a simple but sacred linen cloth—the kind only a servant would wear.

Before the high priest could represent the people on this most holy Day of Atonement, he needed to prepare himself. Aaron was a mediator, but an imperfect one: He had his own sins to deal with. If Aaron wanted to go into God's presence to make atonement for the sins of the people, he needed to be cleansed and forgiven first.

The day began with the high priest appearing before the people as a humbled servant. His garments of honor had been laid aside and he wore the robe of a servant in their place. Then, he brought a young bull as a sin offering before the congregation. With this bull, he would make atonement for his sin for all the people to see. He would then take the blood from that bull and enter into the most holy place and sprinkle it on the mercy seat. In this, he was communicating to himself and the people that even in his role as high priest, he needed a sacrifice to cover his sin.



99 Essential Doctrines (p. 104, DDG)

God is Holy

God's holiness refers to His uniqueness in being separate from all He has created. The Hebrew word for *holy* means *separate* or *set apart*. God's holiness also refers to His absolute purity. God is unstained by the evil of the world. His goodness is perfect, and the moral code we find in the Scriptures is a reflection of His holy nature. As people made in God's image, we are called to holiness.

TEACHING PLAN

The high priest was not the only one who needed to be prepared to come before God; the people did too. Having made purifications for his sin, the high priest then assumed his role as mediator and made atonement for the sins of the people, providing a picture of God's abounding grace.

Read Leviticus 16:15-19.



▪ How was atonement made?

The high priest would then exit the most holy place and stand before the people once more to make atonement for their sins. Two goats were brought to him and the first was sacrificed for the people's sins. Like before, Aaron would take the blood from this goat, go back into the most holy place, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat (v. 15). He would then sprinkle blood on the furniture of the tabernacle to purify God's house before exiting and doing the same for the altar itself. The high priest would have started the day in pristine white linen, only to have his robes stained by blood from the sacrifice, providing a powerful illustration for the people. They had been forgiven of their sin, but that forgiveness did not come without a cost. God had promised that sin would lead to death, and on this day it had. But in God's mercy, their death didn't make the atonement, another's death (in this case, a goat) atoned for their sins.

While the people had reason to celebrate the grace and mercy God had extended to them, they also knew what they witnessed was imperfect and temporary; they would need to gather again the next year and repeat every step of the process. Access to God's presence was still limited—most Israelites would live without ever stepping foot into the most holy place. God's original plan was not to dwell *near* His people, but *with* His people. Our sin built a barrier between us and God. How would He restore what we had broken? He made a way, through a perfect Mediator who would make atonement with His own blood, not that of goats.

Read Leviticus 16:20-22.



Even after shedding the goat's blood to make atonement for the sins of the people, the Day of Atonement was not over. While the blood of the first goat provided atonement within the tabernacle—outside of the people's view—a second goat served as a word picture showing everyone what atonement for sin looks like, as it was set free.

Like Leviticus 16, Hebrews 9:11-14 draws our attention to the ministry of a high priest. This High Priest also came as a servant and was provided to make atonement for the people's sin. But this High Priest was not like any high priest before Him; He was sinless and without fault and had no need to make atonement for His own sin. This High Priest didn't sacrifice any bulls, goats, or other animals. This High Priest—Jesus, the Son of God—laid down His own life and was the perfect one-time sacrifice. All of our sin and shame was laid on Jesus and through His death and resurrection; He has removed it all from us for good. In its place, He has given us His righteousness, forgiveness, and life. This is the High Priest and the sacrifice the Day of Atonement pointed toward. This was the fulfillment of God's plan to remove our sin all along.

▪ What ways can you point people to the perfect advocate and sacrifice for sins—Jesus Christ?

COMMENTARY

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Leviticus 16

16:15-19. The people of Israel were grateful for their mediator, even if they understood he was not perfect and his atoning work would not last. Without the high priest, they would not be able to experience forgiveness of their sin, even if the forgiveness was just temporary. But the people also recognized that the high priest was not the One God spoke of in Eden—the One who would come to crush the serpent's head and defeat sin and death for good. Sin and death continued to plague God's people and the nations around them. Aaron and the other high priests who came after him were not the answer. None of the high priests were the descendant of Abraham who would bring blessing to the world.

Generation after generation waited for the arrival of the One who would provide forgiveness of sin and unhindered relationship with God for good. One day, He came, but not in the way the people expected. Once again, God would show how we come to Him on His terms, not ours. Jesus came to earth as the suffering servant who offered up His life to make atonement for sin. Jesus was nailed to the cross and His blood was shed for sin. As He breathed His last, the veil in the temple was torn in two signifying that as our great High Priest, His atonement was accepted by the Father (Matt. 27:51). He had opened a way into the presence of God, not just for the high priest, but for all people.

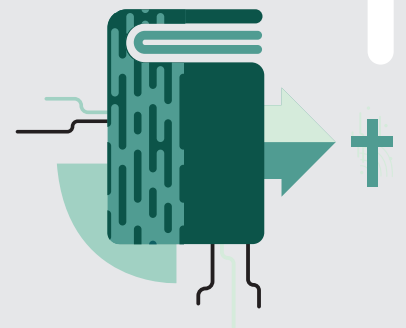
This was God's glorious plan all along. Forgiveness would not come through the blood of goats, but through the blood of His Son. Jesus would be both the perfect Mediator and the perfect sacrifice. Now, whoever trusts in Him is forgiven of all their sin and is able to stand justified before holy God. God does no longer just dwells near them or with them; He dwells within them.

Activity

After the lesson, tell students to imagine they are short-term missionaries to a remote tribe in Mongolia. The Mongolian tribe doesn't yet have a written language. However, they love to draw large murals. The people love the lesson your students taught them, and they want to be able to teach it to their children when your students leave. They have asked your students to help them draw a mural explaining the meaning of the Day of Atonement. Instruct students to come up with those drawings for the tribe (either individually or within groups).

(p. 106, DDG) Christ Connection

Aaron was an imperfect high priest who was required to make atonement for himself and God's people every year. Jesus is the perfect High Priest who made atonement once for all time with His own blood.





A PICTURE OF ATONEMENT

God provides atonement for the people's sins.

JESUS CONNECTION



Aaron was an imperfect high priest who was required to sacrifice a lamb every year. This sacrifice would make atonement for, or cover, the high priest's own sin and the sin of God's people. Jesus is the perfect High Priest who made atonement for sin once for all time with His own blood on the cross.



LIFEWISE QUALITY

MERCY – Choosing not to punish someone who deserves to be punished.



HEAD

What was the purpose of observing the Day of Atonement?

How did the high priest act as a mediator between God and the people? How has Jesus done the same thing for us?



HEART

Access to God's presence was still limited—most Israelites would never set foot in the Most Holy place. Yet God's original plan was not to dwell *near* His people, but *with* His people. Our sin built a barrier between us and God. How did God show us mercy to break down the barrier?

We do not deserve God's mercy, but He gives it freely. Because God is merciful to us, we can show underserved mercy to others who hurt us. What could that look like in your family? Your school? In your community?



HANDS

Think of someone (other than God) who has forgiven you without any penalty or punishment for what you did to them. Even if it was unintentional, if you hurt them and they forgave you without any kind of penalty, they showed you mercy. Find a way to thank that person for their merciful heart. *Examples:* write them a note, call them, invite them to hang out and thank them in person, etc.